



## Good decision making in the public interest

Public sector employees make decisions every day. These decisions - large and small - must be made, and be seen to be made, in the public interest.

Good decision-making helps maintain trust in government and confidence in the Tasmanian public sector. It supports integrity, fairness and good outcomes for the community.

This fact sheet explains:

- ▼ what the public interest means
- ▼ how the public interest applies to your role
- ▼ how personal interests and conflicts of interest can affect decisions
- ▼ how to make good decisions in practice.

### What is “the public interest”

When public sector employees make decisions in the public interest, they are acting for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The public interest:

- ▼ supports the good functioning of government
- ▼ promotes the wellbeing of the community
- ▼ balances the needs of individuals with broader community outcomes.

### Why it matters in everyday decisions

Some decisions have clear and visible impacts, such as building infrastructure or delivering services. Others may seem minor, such as approving leave, completing timesheets, arranging meetings or ordering supplies.

Although the public interest may appear to be different in different situations, it should guide every public sector decision.

### How the public interest applies to your role

Every public sector role contributes – directly or indirectly - to outcomes for Tasmania. Understanding how your role fits into this broader purpose is an important first step in making good decisions.

When making a decision, it can help to consider:

- ▼ What is the purpose of my organisation or role?

- ▼ How does this decision support that purpose?
- ▼ Who might be affected by this decision?
- ▼ How would this decision look to an external observer?

## Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when a personal interest could influence, or could reasonably be seen to influence, how you perform your public duties.

Public sector employees are people first. Everyone has personal interests outside work. Our personal interests can be relational or financial and include things like:

- ▼ personal relationships, including friends, relatives and business associates
- ▼ the roles and responsibilities we have to our families, friends and community that are different from our work roles
- ▼ associations, clubs and organisations to which we belong
- ▼ secondary employment; and
- ▼ financial or economic interests, including direct and indirect assets.

Conflicts of interest can arise in everyday decisions, not just major or high-risk matters. What matters is whether a reasonable person could reasonably believe your personal interests influenced your decision.

You cannot make a decision that is truly in the public interest if you put your interests ahead of your public duty.

Every decision, no matter how small, is an opportunity to act in the public interest.

Considering the impact of your decisions, managing personal interests and seeking advice when needed helps ensure integrity, fairness and trust in the Tasmanian public sector.

## Making good decisions in practice

Good decision-making is not something that public sector employees need to undertake in isolation. It is supported by:

- ▼ discussing your decisions with your manager or colleagues
- ▼ declaring personal interests proactively and early
- ▼ seeking advice when unsure.

Keeping clear records of decisions and the reasons for them also supports transparency and accountability.

#### **Scenario**

You are involved in ordering supplies, and a family member owns a business that could provide them.

#### **Quick public interest check**

- ▼ Is this decision aligned with my role and organisational purpose?
- ▼ Could anyone reasonably question my impartiality?
- ▼ Have I declared any relevant personal interests?
- ▼ Have I sought advice if unsure?

Even if you believe you can act fairly, a reasonable person may perceive a conflict of interest. Declaring the interest early and stepping back from the decision supports public trust.

## **How the Integrity Commission can help**

The Integrity Commission can provide support and guidance on:

- ▼ identifying misconduct risks
- ▼ understanding conflicts of interest
- ▼ managing and declaring personal interests
- ▼ preventing misconduct.



### **The Commission can help**

We are available to provide support and assistance with identifying, reporting, investigating, managing and preventing misconduct: [contact@integrity.tas.gov.au](mailto:contact@integrity.tas.gov.au) or 1300 720 289.